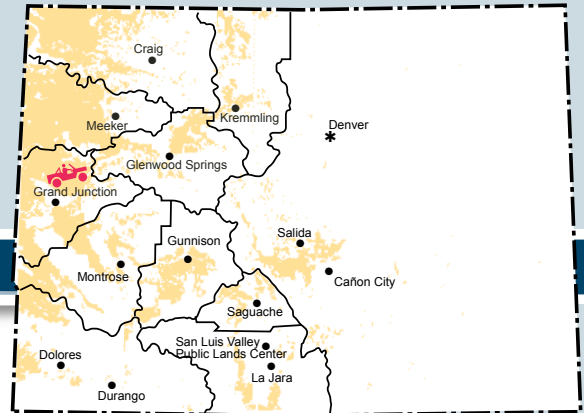


COLORADO

ROAD TRIP

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A Flight Over the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

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The McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area encompasses about 123,000 acres and forms the northwest flank of the Uncompahgre Plateau. The plateau rises like a giant, rolling wave above the Grand Valley in western Colorado. Rugged red-rock canyons that descend to the Colorado River contain some of the most spectacular landforms found anywhere in the region. Area names like Rattlesnake Canyon, Dinosaur Hill, Devils Canyon, Rabbit Valley and Horsethief Canyon contribute to the mystery and diversity of this fascinating high desert landscape.

Congress designated the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area in 2000, to protect nationally significant cultural, natural, ecological, wilderness and scientific values. This National Conservation Area (NCA) is a special place of scenic beauty, solitude, rich history and diverse opportunities for challenge and adventure. Here you may discover outstanding adventures in hiking, mountain biking, float-boating, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle riding, fossil viewing, camping, wildlife viewing and photography.



Mack Ridge above CO River

Let's imagine a one hour educational flight over the NCA to locate the many trailheads to adventure, to discover its diverse beauty and to view some of the recreation opportunities awaiting visitors. We'll begin our fictitious flight at the town of Mack's airstrip located on the northern side of the NCA, 8 miles west of Fruita, Colorado.



It's a beautiful morning for flying in a 1939 Stearman bi-plane (don't worry, the plane has been completely rebuilt, is certified and the pilot has many hours of experience flying this aircraft and he is properly licensed.) Climb aboard! You will be expected to wear the traditional leather helmet, goggles, and scarf!

The pilot, "Duke," helps you into the rear seat, checks your seat belt and encourages you to relax as he points out a little bag just in case the flight is too bumpy for your stomach. The engine begins with a roar and Duke performs several power tests before the bi-plane starts rolling. Suddenly you are in the air and gaining elevation. You take a deep breath and scan the horizon. You are looking across Interstate-70 toward the massive red-rock canyons and ridges of the 75,550-acre Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness which makes up a major portion of the NCA. Duke flies toward the canyons and then banks to the east above the Colorado River. Below, between I-70 and the river, is Mack Ridge where mountain bikers are seen challenging the eight loop trails and the beginning of the 140-mile long Kokopelli Trail. These trails vary in length and difficulty and are easily accessed from the Kokopelli and Mack Ridge Trailheads just off I-70.



Mt. Biker

Duke points ahead to Rattlesnake Canyon. He banks to the south, and you view a series of stone arches made more visible by the morning sunlight, which is shining through what appears to be varying sizes and shapes of doughnut holes. Rattlesnake Canyon and its arches are beautiful, but difficult to access. It requires a 9-mile strenuous hike from the Pollock Bench Trailhead or the use of a four-wheel drive on a rough overland route. Rattlesnake Canyon is part of the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness.



Double Arch



Rainbow Arch

The pilot tops Black Ridge and flies above the two roads leading to the Rattlesnake Arches Trailhead. The upper road is open April 15 to August 14 of each year, and the lower road is open August 15 to February 14 of each year. There is no one on the roads now because both are closed from February 15 to Easter, but hikers can still access the area from below at the Pollock Bench Trailhead. A visitor must travel 14 miles by four-wheel drive vehicle on these roads to this trailhead and then hike 5 miles (round trip) to view the arches.



Ahead, the ridge top drops into the 8-mile long Devils Canyon. The canyon is breath-taking and one of the most beautiful canyons in the NCA. Duke flies parallel to the canyon. On the trail below, you view groups of hikers and horseback riders. They have accessed this canyon and the adjacent Flume Canyon trail network from the Devils Canyon Trailhead. This trailhead is crowded with many vehicles. Several vehicles have horse trailers. This is called the Front Country where Fruita and Grand Junction residents have quick access to this popular area of the NCA.



Devils Canyon

Duke turns the bi-plane to the west and flies above the river. Below, you see Flume Canyon and Pollock Canyon which are accessible from the Pollock Bench Trailhead and provide for Front Country hiking and horseback riding opportunities. You fly over the Fruita Paleontological Area and its multi-colored, badland topography. This is an important scientific area where an interpretive trail explains the scientific significance of fossils found here. Access to this trail is from the Fruita Paleo Area Trailhead.



Pollock Canyon

Approaching the Loma Boat Launch, you see some floaters still rigging their boats for their 25-mile float through Horsethief and Ruby Canyons. There are rafts, canoes and kayaks. While floating these canyons, there are opportunities to camp, hike and explore the adjacent Black Ridge Canyon Wilderness. Some floaters have already launched and can be seen far ahead downstream.



Canoeists

Duke turns southwesterly affording you a better view of a network of three large canyons, each over 10 miles in length. These canyons are Mee, Knowles and Jones. These make up the western portion of the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness. Each canyon is accessible from its own trailhead. Mee and Knowles Canyons are also accessible to

floaters in Ruby Canyon. These extensive canyons branch two or three times in their headwaters. They provide quality wilderness experiences. No visitors are backpacking in the canyons this morning, but several boaters are hiking in the lower sections of these canyons.



Running out of time, Duke heads north to Rabbit Valley. It's a wide, picturesque valley providing the backdrop for a variety of quality recreation experiences. In this area of sandstone canyons and rocky outcrops, visitors are riding motorcycles, ATVs, mountain bikes and horses throughout an extensive trail system. Some four-wheel drive vehicles are exploring the road system. Campers are set up in the three primitive campgrounds.

Pointing to his watch, Duke indicates it's time to head home. The bi-plane skirts the edge of the Trail through Time and the Mygatt-Moore Quarry north of I-70. You view a number of visitors working in the quarry under the supervision of paleontologists from the Museum of Western Colorado (they have paid a fee to participate in a dinosaur dig). Visitors are also observed hiking the Trail Through Time learning about the dinosaurs and geology of the area.

As the bi-plane takes a bee-line back to the town of Mack, it flies over 6&50 Reservoir. Duke skirts the reservoir so as not to disturb the many shorebirds and waterfowl concentrated there. Even though Duke flies clear of the reservoir, a large variety of birds take to the air. This reservoir is on the northern edge of the 21,000-acre Rabbit Valley Important Bird Area designated by the Audubon Society.

You and Duke land in Mack. You exit the plane and reluctantly return the flying garb. Duke presents you with a set of plastic "bi-plane wings."

You have just completed your simulated flight over the NCA and are ready to go explore its REAL resources and REAL recreation opportunities!

For more information, contact the McInnis Canyons NCA/Bureau of Land Management Grand Junction Field Office, 970-244-3000; 2815 H Road, Grand Junction Colorado 81506 or visit its web site: www.co.blm.gov/mcnca/index.htm. NCA brochures are available from the NCA office.



Rabbit Valley, Endurance Ride



Mygatt-Moore Quarry